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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8398

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

RHMFISS/CJTF HOA IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS KHARTOUM 001389

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF S/E NATSIO, AND AF/SPG

NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON

ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV MOPS AU UN SU

SUBJECT: JEM/SLA-UNITY LAUNCH BRAZEN ATTACK AHEAD OF PEACE TALKS

¶1. (SBU) An estimated 250 rebel fighters allied with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA)/Unity struck a police installation in North Kordofan on August 29, resulting in the death of nearly 50 policemen, according to a variety of credible Embassy sources. It was the largest rebel attack associated with the conflict in Darfur to be launched in over eight months. The UN and the AU condemned the incident, and the U.S. issued a similar condemnation on September 3, which was prominently featured on page one of most Sudanese dailies. Suleiman Jamous, the former SLA humanitarian coordinator and a political ally of both JEM and the SLA/Unity, also denounced the attack.

¶2. (SBU) Lasting just two hours, the rebels launched the assault on a camp of the Central Reserve Forces in Wad Banda, south of Al Nahud, at 1500 hours local time. Reports of the number of police fatalities ranges from 41 to 46, with 11 wounded. Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) stationed in the area pursued the attackers, killing between 20 and 50. In eerily familiar comments during a later visit to the site, Minister of the Interior Al Zubeir Bashir Taha suggested that the Sudanese Government may arm the local population to "protect themselves." A Khartoum-based association representing the area's inhabitants has challenged this proposal and plans to send a delegation to Wad Banda to discourage its inhabitants from taking up arms.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: The attack represents a disturbing expansion of the Darfur conflict into neighboring Kordofan. SLA/Unity led by Abdullah Yehia--and estimated to be the strongest Darfur rebel movement--and the JEM faction led by Khalil Ibrahim issued a brazen claim of responsibility for the attack. While both groups participated in the late-July Arusha conference as part of the UN/AU peace process, the incident calls into question ongoing UN/AU assertions of rebel support for the political process, particularly among the armed factions. At the same time, JEM and SLA/Unity may be attempting to strengthen their hand prior to the start of UN/AU-sponsored negotiations in October. Post anticipates that the Sudanese Government may launch a limited military offensive in response to the attack, under the auspices of improving security in North Kordofan. End comment.

FERNANDEZ